THE MINITER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) Yes, Sir. The Ministry of External Affiars has concrete programmes and policies to counter hostile propaganda by any nation inimical to India.

(b) In the year 1999-2000, the Government was faced with the exceptional circumstances relating to the Kargil aggression and the hijacking of IC-814, Focus from routine publicity activities was diverted to meet this extraordinary challenge and certain previously drawn up publicity projects and events could not be implemented.

(c) Aware of the critical need for a pro-active and aggressive strategy for public diplomacy and information dissemination, the Government is implementing concrete and well-defined action plans to counter anti-India propaganda globally.

Influence of Touts in Regional Passport Offices

†229. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that influence of touts is increasing day by day in regional passport offices and even officers posted in these offices are helpless;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that officers and employees posted in these passport offices have been complaining about this but no concrete steps have been taken so far;

(d) if so, whether Government propose to take any effective step to get rid of the touts and to check prevailing irregularities in passport offices; and

(e) if so, the details thereof and by when ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH) : (a) and (b) The Government are

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

aware of the presence of touts or, unauthorised agents outside some passport offices. However, it is not true that the officers working in passport offices are helpless because of the presence of touts. Investigations so far have not established any direct linkage between these unauthorised agents and employees of Passport Offices.

(c) to (e) The Passport Officer and other officers go on rounds of the Passport Office premises to check the presence of touts or unauthorised agents. To eliminate the menace of unauthorised agents or touts, recognised travel agents have been authorised to submit applications for passport related services. In addition, facilitation counters have been introduced in some passport offices where Ex-Servicemen's Associations have been permitted to assist applicants in filling of passport applications at nominal fee. Police Authorities have also been approached to curb the activities of such touts/unauthorised agents.

The Government have introduced wide ranging reforms including decentralisation of acceptance of passport applications at district level and selected Speed Post Centres. These reforms will curb the activities of touts.

Joint Meeting of Permanent Indus Commission

230. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether a joint meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) constituted under the Indus Waters Treaty Act, 1960 was held in New Delhi, recently;

(b) if so, the issues taken up and the decision arrived at in the aforesaid meeting;

(c) whether there was any pressure exercised on Government from any quarter including the Government of Jammu and Kashmir to abrogate the provisions of Indus Waters Treaty Act in view of Pakistan's continued refusal to curb cross border terrorism against India; and

(d) if so, Government's reaction thereto ?